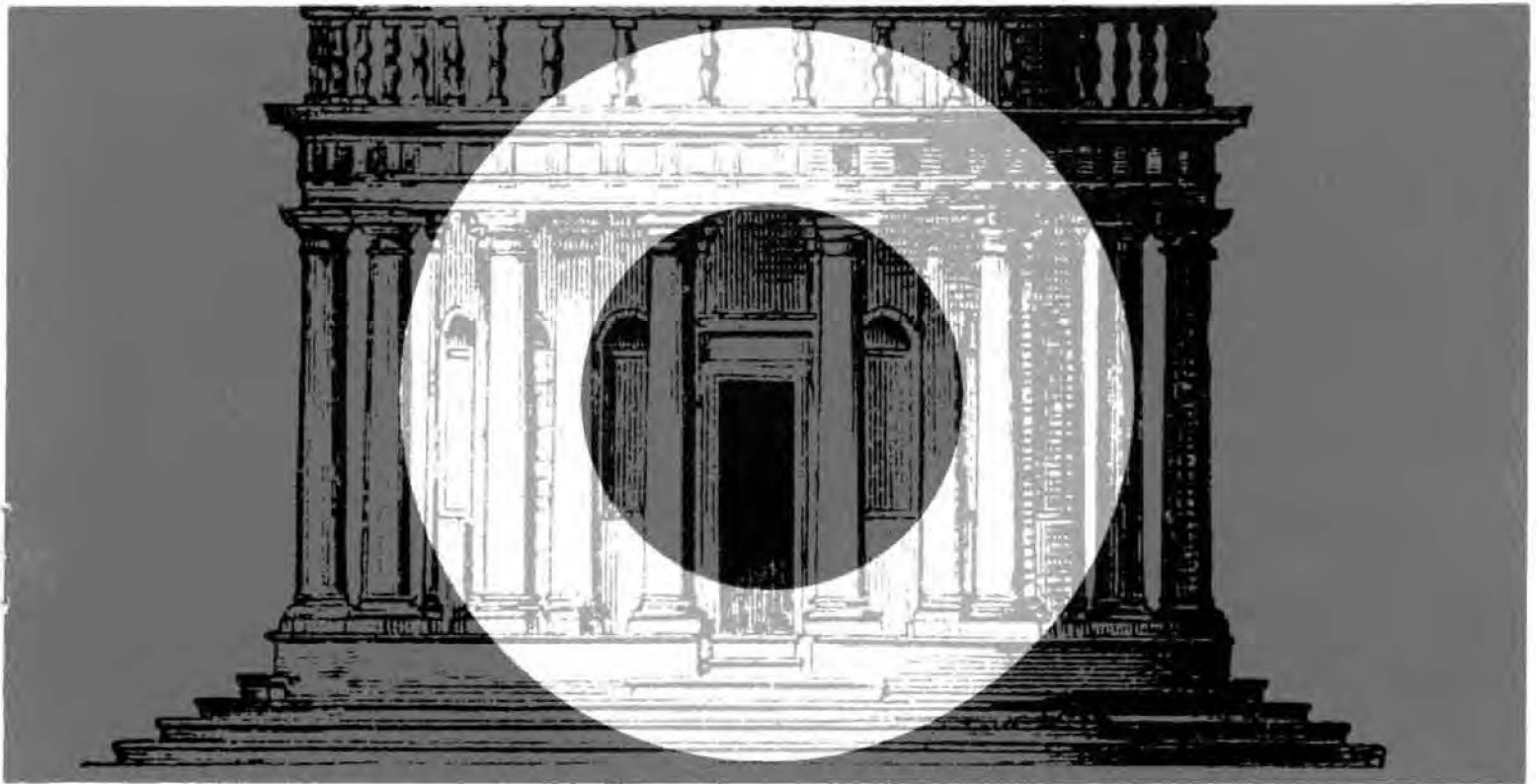


PAPERS ON PLANNING & DESIGN



THOMAS ADAMS: A BIOGRAPHICAL AND
BIBLIOGRAPHIC GUIDE

John David Hulchanski



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Papers on Planning and Design

Paper No. 15

April 1978

Price: \$2.50

General Editor: J.D. Hulchanski

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank Michael Simpson, of the University of Wales, Swansea, for reviewing an early draft of this monograph and making very valuable contributions to it, and Ian Cooper, of the University of Toronto, for his contribution of some of the citations in the bibliography.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this monograph is to provide a basic research guide to the life and work of Thomas Adams, who played an important role in the early history of the British, Canadian and American town planning movements during the first three decades of this century. He played an especially key role in the origins of the Canadian planning movement, since, unlike Britain and the United States, where there were numerous practicing planners, Adams was the only well known and widely respected planning expert in Canada. Most Canadian planning activity between 1914 and 1921--the years Adams was Town Planning Advisor to Canada's Commission of Conservation--is largely the result of his initiative and guidance. He was responsible for organizing numerous national and regional planning conferences to promote planning within Canada and was responsible for establishment of the Town Planning Institute of Canada. It is also due to his efforts that most provinces adopted planning acts, several of which were based on the British Town Planning Act of 1909--the act Adams was responsible for administering before he left Britain for Canada. Thus it would be difficult to begin to understand the development of planning in Canada without knowing a great deal about Thomas Adams.

Yet, we know very little about him. No biography has ever been written, although one is currently in progress.¹ The few journal articles on Adams which do exist are all Canadian, an indication of the important role he played in Canadian planning.² Otherwise, one can only find passing reference to him in British and American planning histories.³

Section I of this research guide provides a brief outline biography of Adams followed, in Section 2, by a bibliography of works Adams published during his long career. Since Adams was very much involved in the day-to-day activities of most of the major planning events and developments for some 35 years, he did a great deal of writing and speech making on most aspects of planning--what planning was, why it should be implemented, how it should be implemented, what the key aspects of planning were, and so on. There are nearly 300 books and articles by Adams listed in the bibliography.

¹Michael Simpson, of the University of Wales, Swansea, is currently writing a biography of Thomas Adams.

²See: A.H. Armstrong, "Thomas Adams and the Commission of Conservation," Plan Canada, 1(1), 1959, pp. 14-32; also published in Planning the Canadian Environment, by L.O. Gilbert, ed., Montreal: Harvest House, 1968, pp. 17-19; J.C. Weaver, "Reconstruction of the Richmond District in Halifax: A Canadian Episode in Public Housing and Town Planning, 1918-1921," Plan Canada, 16(1), pp. 36-47; and The Commission of Conservation, Canada, "Plan Canada", 11(1), 1970 and 11(3), 1972.

³See: G.E. Cherry, The Evolution of Modern British Town Planning, Leighton Buzzard: Leonard Hill Books, 1974; and M. Scott, American City Planning Since 1890, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.

While every attempt has been made to be as comprehensive as possible, there are still likely to be additional articles scattered in various magazines, journals and conference reports. Adams never kept a complete list himself and new references occasionally come to light. That portion of his work published in Canadian periodicals is likely to be much more complete than his British and American publications.

The vast majority of his published work is in the form of short articles on very specific concerns of the day. Many are also published speeches he gave at various meetings and conferences and these tend to provide more of an overview on general planning principles and summaries of progress made. His annual reports to the Commission of Conservation between 1915 and 1919 provide a good history of Canadian planning activities and his own activities during those five years (1915c; 1916o; 1917i; 1918s; and 1919w). A seven page article on "City and Town Planning" which he wrote for the 1930 edition of the Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences provides a good summary of his views on the nature of planning. In that article Adams defines planning in the following terms:

As a science city planning purports to discover the truth about the city in respect to its economic, social and physical conditions. As an art city planning seeks to obtain an economically and socially wholesome arrangement of the ways of communication, of land uses and of building and other structures. (1930a, p.486)

In 1932 a very lively exchange between Lewis Mumford and Adams took place in the pages of The New Republic. In a detailed review of the just completed Regional Plan of New York, of which Adams was General Director of Plans and Surveys, Mumford calls the Plan and the method used to produce it "a monumental failure" and "a badly conceived pudding into which a great many ingredients, some sound, many dubious, have been poured and mixed . . ." ⁴ Adams responds in a detailed letter to The New Republic, pointing out that Mumford has "a different conception of what a Regional Plan should be" and that:

Mr. Mumford does not write as a man who has faced the facts and difficulties of making a thorough survey of urban conditions and tendencies, or of planning a city or region in a democratic country; rather as an esthete-sociologist, who has a religion that is based on high ideals, but is unworkable. (1923d, p. 208)

It is a classic confrontation between a practitioner concerned with the day-to-day practical necessities of planning and a social theorist attempting to put matters in a broader perspective.

Since Adams did so much writing, his work by itself forms a history of those aspects of planning he was personally involved in and provides a good introduction to the general theories and approaches common to planning during

⁴L. Mumford, "The Plan of New York," The New Republic, June 15 and June 22, 1932, pp. 152, 154. This article by Mumford and the response by Adams has been republished in: C. Sussman, ed., Planning the Fourth Migration: The Neglected Vision of the Regional Planning Association of America, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1976, pp. 224-268.

his day. His own personal experience touches on many major aspects of planning between 1900 and the 1930's.

These include:

- the Garden City Movement;
- Britain's first town planning act;
- the establishment of professional planning institutes in Britain, Canada and the United States;
- the Town Planning Branch of the Commission of Conservation, of which he was Director;
- the administration of Canada's first Federal housing program in 1919; and
- the New York Regional Plan.

In his published work can be found descriptive accounts and interesting insights into all these events and activities.

Toward the end of his career Adams became, in 1931, an Associate Professor of Research in Harvard University's planning program, the first planning degree program in North America. He was also a Lecturer and Research Consultant at M.I.T. During this period he wrote four books on planning. Two of them were on the subject of planning residential environments and were published in the Harvard City Planning Studies series, aimed largely at a professional audience (1931h and 1934a). His Recent Advances in Town Planning (1932f) and Outline of Town and City Planning: A Review of Past Efforts and Modern Aims (1935c) became two of the leading planning textbooks during the inter-war years and repre-

sent a distillation of more than thirty years of his own practical experience and thinking on planning. Like most planning manuals of the time, both have a strong historical section tracing planning back to Egypt, Greece and Rome followed by a review of the important modern legislation, planning methods and plans developed during the first thirty years of this century.

His last book, the Outline of Town and City Planning, has a foreword by Franklin D. Roosevelt, written while he was Governor of New York State. In it Roosevelt states that the proper regulation of urban and rural development is "among the most important needs of our modern civilization" and that Adams is "peculiarly qualified to speak with authority on the subject" because of his thirty years experience "both as a practitioner and teacher of city planning in the United States, in Canada and in England." (1935c, pp. 5-6).

A detailed topical index to the bibliography is provided in section 3. About one third of the citations in the bibliography are on specifically Canadian topics. In fact, almost half of everything Adams wrote was published during the seven years he was the Federal Town Planning Advisor in Canada. The one aspect of planning to continually receive attention from Adams was housing. About thirty percent of the citations are concerned with the problems of housing and urban land for housing. The problem was how to provide inexpensive

working class housing in well planned residential developments--an especially acute problem facing cities throughout his entire career. During times of real estate booms a great deal of housing was provided but at highly inflated prices and in very irregular and inefficient suburban developments, while, during recessions and during the first World War, very little housing at all was built. Thus, in either case, housing provided a constant and major practical problem for planners and other reform advocates of the day. The other major aspect of planning to occupy a great deal of Adams' time and efforts, especially during the 1920's, was regional planning. About ten percent of the citations are on regional planning and, of course, many relate to the New York Regional Plan.

Finally, section 4 lists the major British planning studies Adams and his consulting firm undertook between 1923 and 1931 and section 5 lists obituaries published upon his death in March, 1941.

It is hoped that this research guide to the life and work of Thomas Adams will prove useful to planning historians and that it will help stimulate further work into planning history, especially Canadian planning history and the part played in it by Adams.

1. OUTLINE BIOGRAPHY

- 1871 Born in Edinburgh, Scotland on September 10, son of James Adams and Margaret Johnstone, was raised on a farm and attended Daniel Stewarts College, Edinburgh.
- 1890's Worked as a farmer in Scotland and became interested in the land question. Wrote a number of articles on land for the Edinburgh Evening News advocating a free market in land and a more equitable system of land taxation as the only hope for preserving agriculture.
- 1898 (or 1899) Moved to London to become a writer, working free-lance on the land question as a journalist. It was during this period that he began part-time studies in surveying, probably in order to make himself a more credible authority on the land question and perhaps to provide himself something to fall back on in case his precarious living as a journalist failed him.
- 1897 Married Caroline Bertha Weierner, the daughter of an immigrant German music teacher. They eventually had four sons and one daughter.
- 1900 Acted as agent for the Master of Elibank, the successful Liberal candidate for Parliament in the General Election. Adams was a lifelong Liberal, though the only political office he held was that of a parish councillor around 1895.
- 1900 Appointed the first Secretary of the Garden City Association. Over the next two years Adams addressed some 250 meetings promoting the garden city idea. He also organized several exhibits on inexpensive house construction methods (e.g., the 1905 Letchworth Cheap Cottage Exhibition and another in 1907).
- 1903 Appointed manager of the First Garden City Company, which built Letchworth. He also helped select the site for Letchworth.

- 1904 Appointed Editor of Garden Cities and Town Planning, the official journal of the Garden City Association. He remained editor until 1906.
- 1905 Garden City and Agriculture: How to Solve the Problem of Rural Depopulation is published (180 pages). It is Adams' first book and is an amplification of a paper on "Garden City and Agriculture" which he read before a Conference held at Letchworth in September, 1904.
- 1906 Between 1906 and 1909 Adams practised as a town planning consultant. He is probably the first person in England to establish a private planning consulting firm. He acted as consultant to the Marquis of Salisbury, the Earl of Lytton and other large land owners in England, preparing plans for Knebworth, Alkrington, Newton Moor, Shirehampton and Glyn Gory, and a number of other garden suburbs and residential estates. It is believed that G.L. Pepler, another prominent figure in the early British town planning movement, was his partner for at least part of the time in 1909.
- 1909 Hired by the Local Government Board as their Town Planning Inspector for England and Wales. He was the official responsible for administering the Town Planning Act of 1909. In this capacity he held inquiries into about eighty proposed town planning schemes.
- 1911 Attended the third National City Planning Conference in Philadelphia, where he urged that all cities be planned and that their populations be spread out.
- 1912 Appointed External Examiner on Civic Design at the University of Liverpool--the first British university to have such a program.
- 1912 Prominent Canadians petition the Commission of Conservation to hire Adams, stating that he is the best qualified expert capable of dealing with the pressing problems of planning working class housing and suburban sub-divisions. Among supporters of the nation-wide petition were: the Canadian Manufacturers Association; the Hamilton Board of Trade; the

Canadian Public Health Association; the Union Committee of Charitable Organizations, Montreal; and the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire.

- 1913 Canadian Prime Minister Borden, on behalf of the Commission of Conservation, made a request to the British Government that they loan Thomas Adams to Canada. But the Local Government Board stated that they were unable to spare him.
- 1914 (January) Elected the first President of the British Town Planning Institute. Adams was also one of the primary co-founders of the Institute.
- 1914 (May) Attended the sixth International City Planning Conference which was held in Toronto that year. He addressed the conference on the "Experience Under the English Town Planning Act," and reportedly received an ovation. He then visited major Canadian cities speaking on the housing problem under the auspices of the Commission of Conservation.
- 1914 (July) Appointed Town Planning Advisor to the Commission of Conservation's newly established Town Planning Branch. It took two requests from Canada's Prime Minister Borden to induce the Local Government Board to part with Adams. He was given a three year contract by the Canadian Government. At the Local Government Board he was replaced by two prominent planners, Raymond Unwin and G.L. Pepler.
- 1914 (September) The British Town Planning Institute holds a farewell dinner in honour of Thomas Adams.
- 1914 (October) Began working full-time with the Commission of Conservation in Ottawa.
- 1915 Visited every provincial government except P.E.I., advocating provincial adoption of town planning legislation. The Nova Scotia Town Planning Act of 1915 became the first act to make planning compulsory. It was modelled on a draft law drawn up by Adams, who spent several weeks in Halifax preparing and revising the bill. By 1918 Adams persuaded five provinces to adopt new town planning legislation, although only two--Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan--made planning compulsory.

- 1915 Played a key role in establishing a national Civic Improvement League for Canada.
- 1917 Received his second three year contract from the Commission of Conservation. He is also given three assistants: A.S. Dalzell, to help deal with the western provinces; H.L. Seymour, to help with the eastern provinces; and W.D. Cromarty, to assist in preparing designs of inexpensive housing for submission to provincial governments.
- 1917 Rural Planning and Development: A Study of Rural Conditions and Problems in Canada (281 pages), Adams' second book, is published by the Commission of Conservation. The book deals with the social conditions and the prevailing methods of land settlement and development in rural areas, with recommendations for solutions to rural problems. It was the first of a projected series of three studies Adams planned to do on Canadian town planning. The second on urban planning and development and the third outlining legislative and administrative reforms needed to solve urban and rural problems were never completed.
- 1918 The Halifax Relief Commission is established to rebuild the city after the great 1917 harbour explosion. Thomas Adams was appointed planning consultant.
- 1918 Appointed advisor to the newly created Federal Cabinet Committee on Housing. The object of the Committee was to formulate standards provinces must meet to qualify for their share of the Federal Government's \$25,000,000 loan program for low-priced housing.
- 1919 The Town Planning Institute of Canada is established, primarily by Adams, who is elected its first president. In 1919 the Institute had 52 members.
- 1920 Adams traveled to London, England to represent the Town Planning Institute of Canada at the Inter-allied Congress on Housing and Town Planning and at the sixth annual meeting of the British Town Planning Institute.

- 1921 After the Canadian Government dissolved the Commission of Conservation, Adams becomes Town Planning Advisor to the Canadian National Parks' Town Planning Branch, which took over some of the functions of the Commission of Conservation's Town Planning Branch.
- 1921 Along with W.D. Cromarty, Architectural Assistant to the Commission of Conservation, Adams delivers a series of lectures to the ten major universities in Canada. About 700 students in schools of engineering, architecture and social science attended.
- 1921 Offered teaching positions at Harvard and M.I.T. Between 1921 and 1936 Adams lectured part-time at M.I.T.
- 1922 Welland, Kitchener and London (Ontario) each hire Thomas Adams as their town planning consultant.
- 1923 Adams returns to London, England and establishes a partnership with Longstreth Thompson. The firm of Thomas Adams and Longstreth Thompson, Town Planning Consultants is commissioned to prepare a regional plan for West Middlesex. The distinguished architect E. Maxwell Fry joined the firm around 1925 and was made a partner around 1927. Fry left the firm around 1931 and the partnership with Thompson was dissolved in 1934.
- 1923 Upon his appointment in September as chief consultant to the Committee for the Regional Plan of New York and its Environs, Adams cancels all his Canadian contracts with the exception of Kitchener and the planning of a new town being built by Armstrong, Whitworth and Co. in Newfoundland. His contract as town planning consultant to the Canadian government ended in July, 1923.
- 1930 After six years as General Director of Plans and Surveys for the Regional Plan of New York, Adams retires from active participation in the Plan, having completed preparation of the Plan's ten volumes. He had a staff of 150 and a budget of about a million dollars. Adams still continued as a part-time consultant to the Committee.

- 1930 Adams is hired to prepare a comprehensive plan for the City of Windsor.
- 1930 Between 1930 and 1936 Adams was Associate Professor of Research in City Planning Department at Harvard. It was essentially a research position and marks his transition to an 'elder statesman' role in planning (after all, where could one go after planning New York?). During this period Adams writes four books: in 1931, Neighbourhoods of Small Homes: Economic Density of Low-Cost Housing in America (with R. Whitten as co-author); in 1932, Recent Advances in Town Planning; in 1934, The Design of Residential Areas: Basic Considerations, Principles and Methods; and in 1935, Outline of Town and City Planning: A Review of Past Efforts and Modern Aims (with a foreword by Franklin D. Roosevelt).
- 1933 Elected Corresponding Member of the American Society of Landscape Architects.
- 1934 Adams suffers a coronary but recovers and continues his consulting work in Britain, with T.A. Jeffryes, an architect from Liverpool, as his assistant. During this period he prepares plans for Bexhill, Sussex and Dundee.
- 1937 Elected President of the British Institute of Landscape Architects.
- 1940 Died in Sussex, England on March 24 after a short illness.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

Am. City	American City
C.E.	Canadian Engineer
C.M.J.	Canadian Municipal Journal
E.C.R.	Engineering and Contract Record (Canada)
G.C. & T.P.	Garden Cities and Town Planning
J.A.I.A.	Journal of the American Institute of Architects
J.T.P.I.	Journal of the Town Planning Institute (British)
J.T.P.I.C.	Journal of the Town Planning Institute of Canada
L.A.	Landscape Architecture
M.R.C.	Municipal Review of Canada
N.M.R.	National Municipal Review
P.N.C.C.P.	Proceedings of the National Conference on City Planning
T.P.C.L.	Town Planning and Conservation of Life
T.P.R.	Town Planning Review

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ADDENDUM

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